

EXTRACTS

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FROM A

ADVERTISEMENT

PRACTICAL TREATISE,

UPON

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

BY

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ADVERTISEMENT.

*T H E following are the sentiments
of a Member of the Church of Eng-
land of eminent piety, whose writings
are a monument to his praise, and shew
the good understanding he had received
in the weighty concerns of life and sal-
vation.*



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EXTRACTS, &c.

I HAVE shewn, that the reading of *plays* or any other books of this kind, is a dangerous and sinful entertainment, that corrupts our hearts, and separates the Holy Spirit from us. You will now perhaps ask me, if it is unlawful for a Christian to go to the *play-house*. I answer, that it is absolutely unlawful. As unlawful, as for a Christian to be a *drunkard* or a *glutton*, or to *curse* and *swear*. This I think will be easily proved.—

We have the authority of scripture to affirm, that *Evil communication corrupts good manners*; and that *unedifying discourse grieves*

grieves the Holy Spirit. Now the *third* commandment is not more plain and express against *swearing*, than this doctrine is plain and positive against going to the *play-house*. If you should see a person, that acknowledges the *third* commandment to be a divine prohibition against swearing, yet going to a *house* and giving his *money* to persons, who were there met, to *curse* and *swear* in fine language, and invent *musical oaths* and *imprecations*, would you not think him mad in the highest degree? Now consider, whether there be a less degree of madness in going to the play-house. You own, that God has called you to a great purity of conversation, that you are forbid all *foolish discourse* and *filthy jestings*, as expressly as you are forbid *swearing*; that you are to let no *corrupt communication* proceed out of your mouth, but *such as is good for the use of edifying*; and yet you go to the *house set apart* for corrupt communications, you hire persons to entertain you with all manner of *ribaldry*, *prophaneness*, *rant*, and *impurity* of discourse; who are to present

present you with *vile* thoughts and *lew'd* imaginations in *fine language*, and to make *wicked*, *vain*, and *impure* discourse more lively and affecting than you could possibly have it in any ill company.—If the *play-house* was filled with *rakes* and *ill women*, there would be nothing to be wondered at in such an assembly.—But for persons who profess purity and holiness, who would not be suspected of *immodesty*, or *corrupt communication*, for them to come under the roof of a *house devoted* to such ill purposes, and be pleased spectators of such actions and discourses, as are the pleasure of the most abandoned persons; for them to give their money to be thus entertained, is such a contradiction to all piety and common sense, as cannot be sufficiently exposed.

——For consider with yourself, is the business of *players* so contrary to piety, so inconsistent with the spirit and temper of a true Christian, that it is next to a contradiction to suppose them united? How then can you take yourself to be *innocent*, who *delight* in their sins, and *hire* them
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to commit them? You may make yourself a partaker of other men's sins, by negligence, and for want of reproofing them; but certainly, if you stand by, and assist men in their evil actions, if you make their vices your pleasure and entertainment, and pay your money to be so entertained, you make yourself a partaker of their sins in a very high degree. And consequently, it must be as unlawful to go to a *play*, as it is unlawful to approve, encourage, assist, and reward a man for renouncing a Christian life. Let therefore every man or woman that goes to a *play*, ask themselves this question, Whether it suits with their religion to act the *parts* that are there acted? Perhaps they would think this as inconsistent with that degree of piety that they profess, as to do the vilest things. But let them consider, that it must be a wicked and unlawful pleasure, to delight in any thing that they dare not do themselves. Let them also consider, that they are really *acting* those indecencies and impieties themselves, which they think is the particular guilt of the

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the *players*. For a person may very justly be said to do that *himself*, which he *pays* for the doing, and which is done for his pleasure. You must therefore, if you would be consistent with yourself, as much abhor the thoughts of *being at a play*, as of being a *player* yourself; for to think that you must forbear the one, and not the other, is as absurd as to suppose, that you must be temperate yourself, but may assist, encourage, and reward other people for their intemperance. The business of a *player* is prophane, wicked, lew'd, and immodest; to be any way therefore approving, assisting, or encouraging him in such a way of life, is as evidently sinful, as it is sinful to assist and encourage a man in *stealing*, or any other wickedness. Now it is of mighty use to conceive things in a right manner, and to see them as they are in their own nature. While you consider the play-house as only a *place of diversion*, it may perhaps give no offence to your mind: there is nothing *shocking* in the thought of it; but if you would lay aside this name of it
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for a-while, and consider it in its *own nature*, as it really is, you would find that you are as much deceived if you consider the *play-house* as only a place of diversion, as you would be, if you consider the house of God as only a *place of labour*. For though the devil be not professedly worshipped by hymns directed to him, yet most that is there sung is to his service ; he is there *obeyed* and *pleased* in as certain a manner, as God is worshipped and honoured in the church.—Hence it appears, that if, instead of considering the *play-house* as only a place of diversion, you will but examine what materials it is made of, if you will but consider the nature of the entertainment, and what is there doing, you will find it as wicked a place, as sinful a diversion, and as truly the peculiar pleasure and triumph of the devil, as any wicked place, or sinful diversion in the heathen world. When therefore you are asked to go to a *play*, dont think that you are asked only to go to a *diversion* ; but be assured that you are asked to *yeild* to the devil, to go over to his

his *party*, and to make one of his congregation; that if you do go, you have not only the guilt of *buying* so much vain and corrupt communication, but are also as certainly guilty of going to the devil's house, and doing him the same honour, as if you was to partake of some *heathen festival*.

Let not therefore any one say, that he is not answerable for those vices and debaucheries which are occasioned by the *play-house*; for so far as he partakes of the pleasure of the *stage*, and is an encourager of it, so far he is chargeable with those disorders which necessarily are occasioned by it.—Since therefore it cannot be doubted by any one, whether the *play-house* be a nursery of vice and debauchery, since the evil effects it has upon people's manners, is as visible as the sun at noon, one would imagine, that all people of virtue and modesty should not only avoid it, but avoid it with the utmost abhorrence; that they should be so far from entering into it, that they should

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detest the very sight of it. For what a contradiction is it to common sense, to hear a woman lamenting the miserable lewdness and debauchery of the age, the vicious taste, and the irregular pleasures of the world, and at the same time dressing herself to meet the lewdest part of the world, at the fountain-head of all lewdness, and making herself one of that crowd, where every abandoned wretch is glad to be present.—She must therefore consider, not only whether such a diversion hinders the regularity of her life, or breaks in upon her devotions, public or private ; but whether it hinders or any ways affects that *spirit and temper*, which all her devotions aspire after. Is it conformable to that heavenly affection, that love of God, that purity of heart, that wisdom of mind, that perfection of holiness, that contempt of the world, that watchfulness and self-denial, that humility and fear of sin ? Is it conformable to these graces, which are to be the *daily subject* of all her prayers ? This is the only way for her to know the

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innocency of going to a play. If what she there hears and sees, has no *contrariety* to any *graces* or *virtues* which she prays for ; if all that there passes be fit for the *purity* and *piety* of one that is led by the Spirit of Christ, and is working out her salvation *with fear and trembling* ; if the stage be an entertainment that may be thought according to the will of God ; then she disposes of an hour very innocently.—If it is right and proper in itself, it needs no excuse ; but if it be *wrong* and *dangerous* to religion, we are not to use it *cautiously*, but avoid it *constantly*.—Now though you find no particular text of scripture, condemning the *stage*, or *tragedy*, or *comedy*, in express words ; yet, what is much more, you find that such entertainments are a gross contradiction to the whole nature of religion. —The entertainment of the *stage*, as it consists of *blasphemous* expressions, *wicked* speeches, *swearing*, *curfing*, and *prophaning* the name of God ; as it abounds with *impious rant*, *filthy jests*, *distracted passions*, gross descriptions of *lust*, and *wanton songs*,

is a *contradiction to every doctrine* that our Saviour and his apostles have taught us.— I again affirm, that it is impossible for truly religious people to *bear* the entertainment of the stage. For consider only the matter in this short view. A truly religious person is to love and fear and adore God, with *all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his strength*; now I ask you, who is it that has this true love of God? Is it he that delights in prophaneness at *all times*? Or, is it he that can bear with prophaneness *some times*? Or, is it he that abhors and avoids it at *all times* and in *all places*?—Am I not therefore supported by plain reason and common sense, when I affirm, that it is for want of true piety, that any people are able to *bear* the entertainment of the stage?—Let me desire you, when you are dressed for a play, to read over our Saviour's divine sermon on the *mount*, before you go; try whether your soul is full of the spirit that is there taught; examine whether you then feel in your heart such a love of the scripture, as to

love *those conditions* of blessedness that are there described, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are they that mourn, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.* Do you find yourself in these heights of holiness? Is your soul reformed, purified, and exalted, according to *these doctrines*? Or can you imagine that you are conforming yourself to those doctrines, that you depart from none of them, when you are preparing yourself for a pleasure, which is the proper pleasure of the most corrupt and debauched minds? *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* Can you think that you are rightly affected with this doctrine, that you are labouring after this purity, that you are preparing to see God, when you are going to an entertainment, to which *they* ought only to go, who have no *thoughts* of seeing God, nor any desires after that purity which prepares us for it?——

It is not my intention to trouble the world with any particular notions of my

own ; or to impose any unnecessary rules or fancied degrees of perfection, upon any people. But in declaring against the *stage*, as I have done, I have no more followed any particular spirit or private temper, or any more exceeded the plain doctrine of scripture, than if I had declared against *drunkenness* and *debauchery*. Let a man but be so much a *Christian*, as not to think it too *high a degree* of perfection, or too *strict and rigid*, to be in earnest in these two petitions, *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil* ; and he has Christianity enough to persuade him, that it is neither too high a perfection, nor too *strict and rigid*, constantly to declare against, and always to avoid, the entertainment of the *stage*.

T H E E N D.

